

from both the Hmong and the American sides of their extended Minnesota community. Of their two main speakers, one was U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone, who encouraged CAAR to persist in its efforts to educate the public through the media and by continued organizing. The other was Hmong community elder and Lao war veteran Xang Vang, who extended his intergenerational congratulations to the youthful CAAR members.

Six months after the protest against the station began, on January 10, 1999, a two-part radio program entitled *Calling America Home* was broadcast on Minnesota radio station KQRS. As part of the agreement made by KQRS to address issues of racism in the Twin Cities, Hmong American college and high school students put together a program addressing prejudice and racism that Asian American youth face. Pakou Hang, talk show host and a senior at Yale University, opened the program with the statement "It is predicted by the year 2050, every ethnic group, including the formerly dominant Caucasian ethnic group, will be a minority."

After the long protest that began in reaction to defamatory slurs against their traditional culture, Hmong Americans in Minnesota have made significant advances in establishing their own voices and images in various cultural forms. At the same time, a rising generation of Hmong American women and men are revisiting the cultural traditions that will strengthen their community in America. They are joined by new communities of Asian American playwrights, musicians, poets, filmmakers, writers, and artists who are asserting their visions of Asian American culture.

The Last Bastion



I still remember the scene in my fourth-grade class. Mrs. Granada was trying to teach a bunch of nine-year-olds the meaning of democracy. She asked us to explain the Boston Tea Party slogans that set off the Revolutionary War, "No taxation without representation" and "Taxation without representation is tyranny." More specifically, she wanted us to understand the meaning of "representation." Hands shot up, and one by one pulled back as the guesses missed the mark. Exasperated, Mrs. Granada explained it like this. "Representation means having your say."

My own hand stayed down. Politics was one of my father's favorite topics, but he never mentioned representation. Mrs. Granada's explanation didn't quite make sense to me. In my family's traditional household, the best thing children could say was nothing. Mom was one notch up from the children, with say over

Washington Governor Gary Locke, with First Lady Mona Lee Locke, among the cheering crowds at his family's ancestral village in Jilong, China, in October 1997 (Rod Mar/Seattle Times)

us, but that was about it. Confucius didn't care much for women. Judging from the confused looks on the faces of the other kids, I guessed that they had some kind of Confucius in their homes. It was hard for us fourth graders to comprehend the purpose of a war fought over something we didn't have.

Inside my family, Dad had all the say. According to my schoolroom lessons, that meant he had all the representation, the power, and the taxation, too. As I grew older and learned more about representation, I realized how little say Dad had outside of our house. He had come to America before Chinese could become citizens and have the vote. Even though that law had changed, my parents didn't think about becoming naturalized, despite my father's avid interest in politics. I suspect they didn't believe that the say of two Chinese immigrants like themselves could mean very much.

One day when I was in my late teens, Dad got a surprise call from the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The caller said, you've been in this country for more than twenty years; why don't you become a citizen? My father looked at his six American-born Chinese kids seated around the dinner table that night and said to us, "Doesn't look like we're going anywhere—I may as well become a citizen."

To prepare for his citizenship test, he memorized the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence, documents that he already knew well. He memorized all the presidents, vice presidents, and secretaries of state, the dates of their terms, and with whom they served. It gave him great pleasure to grill his teenage kids at the dinner table, his bully pulpit. "Helen, do you know who the fourth vice president of the United States was?" "No," I'd mutter. Triumphant he'd exclaim, "George Clinton, 1805-1809—in his first term." By the end of the meal he would declare that he was much smarter than any of his smart-aleck children, despite his white hair. He'd also use the occasion to tighten his discipline, since we were obviously not studying hard enough.

But outside our house, the idea of representation was being defined for me. The civil rights movement was fighting for representation of African Americans. Millions of young people—the baby boomer generation—were demanding to be heard. American women were rising up, seeking emancipation from the Western-style Confucianism toward women. Everybody wanted their say. In the parlance of the times, I could dig it.

For me to have a say was more complicated. To have your say means that you are being heard. To be heard would suggest that you are also seen. I never saw or heard any Americans who looked like me in the news. Never. It was as

though we didn't exist. That sense of invisibility would wash over me at various times in my life—while waiting in line, at the airport, the bank, or the grocery store, when other people—most often, a white man in a business suit—would try to walk right over me. Over the years I have learned to make myself visible. Nowadays when someone tries to step over me, I yell back, loud and long, New York style. I am waiting for the right moment to say, like Barbra Streisand's Fanny Brice, "What am I, chop suey?"

All this came to mind when I was asked in 1995 to give the opening address to the Organization of Chinese Americans' Leadership Summit, a gathering of Asian American civic and community leaders from around the country. It was quite an honor, and I wanted to offer a leadership challenge to the gathering, which was taking place soon after the Justice for Wards Cove Workers effort had been defeated in Congress for a fourth time.

I decided to talk about how Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders could have our say, even when our Washington allies stab us in the back, as they did with Wards Cove. I talked about moving forward as a community by taking risks and going beyond the days when those who spoke up were investigated, imprisoned, deported, or otherwise stigmatized.

I said that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders will never achieve equal partnership and equal power with other Americans as long as we are seen as the quiet voice of reason, the ones who always behave, the people willing to discuss and negotiate no matter how outrageously we are mistreated. I said that we needed to broaden our repertoire of what we displayed as leadership, to be less predictable and more creative in our tactics. That we ought to shake up friend and foe alike, to tolerate dramatic actions, and to welcome the emergence of Asian American leaders who could stir up passions in the manner of the Reverend Al Sharpton and such leaders of other communities. I asked them to imagine the scenario of an Asian American group dumping a truckload of rotten fish on the steps of Congress when it failed us for the fourth time on Wards Cove.

When I finished, there was polite applause from the staid audience. The OCA president escorted me from the podium, saying, "Thank you for that very disturbing speech."

It was not what they expected to hear. I decided to try out the same message again, this time to a younger crowd at the East Coast Asian Students Union conference on the occasion of its twentieth anniversary in 1998. This time I was more direct: "We have to stop being so fucking polite!" Instead of polite

applause, there was shocked silence to hear a woman like their mothers say such a thing. I repeated my statement. This time, they cheered. They were already leading the way for all Asian Americans, through their new wave of outspoken organizing on their college campuses. This generation is determined to have its say, to be heard and seen and represented. After all, as I learned in the fourth grade, taxation without representation is tyranny.

. . .

In Governor Gary Locke's waiting room, under the domed edifice of the Washington State Legislative Building, it is impossible not to feel a sense of the extraordinary. On the walls of the imposing anteroom hang portraits of eighteen previous governors. Each larger-than-life figure looks remarkably like the next—pale complexions, of European heritage. The only variation in the theme is Dixy Lee Ray, who in 1977 became the state's first and so far only female governor.

Next door, in the governor's chair, is a man with unmistakably Asian features. In case that detail is somehow missed, he is surrounded by an assortment of modern-day chinoiserie. Above his head, a sixty-foot-long dragon kite dangles from the high ceiling, lording over the cavernous room and complemented by a decorative Asian fan and framed paintings in Chinese brushstroke-style calligraphy. Governor Gary Locke, the twenty-first governor of the state of Washington, is the first Chinese American to be elected as a governor in the United States, and the first Asian American to head a state on the mainland.

In Washington, where Asian Americans are less than 4 percent of the population, Gary Locke, the son and grandson of Chinese immigrants, was elected by a sweeping 56 percent of the electorate in 1996. Locke doesn't downplay his ethnic heritage—he points with pride to his past support for issues like redress for Japanese American internees, and has given prominent placement in his office to the photograph of the stately residence where his grandfather worked as a houseboy only a few blocks away.

Before running for Washington's highest office, Locke conducted test polls to see if his Asian ancestry might trigger a negative reaction among the voters. He found that a small percentage of people would never vote for any candidate who wasn't white. The remaining voters were his to win—and he never looked back. "The fact that I was Asian American never

came into the campaign as an issue," said Locke. Some observers say that the majority of voters didn't think of him as an Asian candidate at all, and a few speculate that the image of the hardworking, smart Asian may even have helped. Locke says he doesn't believe being Asian American offered any advantages to his candidacy; rather, he credits timing, luck, and the fact that he knocked on more doors and shook more hands.

Two years after his inauguration as Washington's governor, Gary Locke still has trouble grasping his status as a role model and a symbol, not just to Asian Americans, but internationally, in Asia, and to his rural white constituents in eastern Washington. There, he and his family are seen as creating a new Camelot in the governor's mansion. They are the classic American immigrant story: the youthful forty-eight-year-old governor with his glamorous wife, former TV reporter Mona Lee, and two young children, Emily and Dylan, both born during his administration. Some say the Locke family has a Kennedyesque aura that may transcend race. "It's hard to believe, but a lot of folks in Washington don't see Gary as Asian at all," said then Seattle city council member Martha Choe.

While some of Locke's constituents may overlook his race, not so his fellow Asian Americans, particularly Chinese Americans, who would like to model themselves after him. To them, his ascendancy portends a new era for Asian Americans as leaders of and contributors to America. On the governor's wall, close to his Eagle Scout plaque, is a massive, framed calligraphed letter from "Nine Chinese Elders" of the state of Georgia, in formal language reminiscent of an imperial proclamation:

Greetings: As good news spreads quickly through the Chinese American community, we here in Georgia have heard a report that you have been elected to office as the Governor of the great state of Washington . . . Like the old Chinese proverb about beans and melons, your good reputation is an indication that you have reaped what you have sown . . . Please consider the needs of your sizable and extensive Chinese American constituency nationwide, which looks up to you.

Political empowerment has been a stubborn hurdle for Asian American communities. Timothy Fong, professor at Holy Names College in Oakland, California, describes it as "the final frontier" in his book *The*

Contemporary Asian American Experience: Beyond the Model Minority. A dynamic political life has always existed within the confines of Asian American ethnic communities, but a toehold in mainstream electoral politics has been elusive. Most non-Asian elected officials rarely visit Asian American communities except in their familiar campaign posture: arm extended, palm open.

Why haven't Asian Americans advanced as much as Jews, or Italians, or other immigrants who also came at the beginning of the twentieth century? Culture is often cited, the lack of progress attributed to a cultural uninterest in politics, a clannish tendency to stick to themselves, and a willingness to accept "benevolent" despotic rule. The real answer is much simpler: Asian Americans lost at least three generations of political development because of federal laws that barred us from citizenship and full political participation. It was not until 1952 that all Asian Americans got the right to become citizens and to vote, when Congress finally struck down the last of the anti-Asian exclusionary citizenship laws.

Only since that milestone of citizenship was crossed did the first Asian American go to Congress, with the election of Dalip Singh Saund from Southern California in 1956. Three years later, after Hawaii was admitted to statehood, Hiram Fong and Daniel Inouye took their seats in the U.S. Senate, followed by Patsy Mink to the House of Representatives. In 1999, the list was still unacceptably short. In addition to the three Asian American members of Congress from Hawaii, only five others sit in the House, a number which includes the Pacific Islander nonvoting representatives from Guam and American Samoa. The organizations and networks, the know-how and the relationships so essential to creating a political presence have been evolving for a relatively short time. With each elected official, each visible community leader, new inroads are being made for others to follow.

In recent years, the path to political empowerment has been tortuous. By the late 1990s, with fears of the Soviet "evil empire" extinguished and the bugaboo of China resurrected, simply looking Chinese in certain quarters is enough to merit a scarlet "S" and a spy probe. Not so in Washington State, where the economy's heavy reliance on Pacific Rim trade may have turned Locke's Chinese heritage into an asset. Even before his inauguration ceremony, officials from bitter rivals Taiwan and the People's Republic of China were jockeying for the new governor's favor. On his first day

in office, he met with envoys from Taiwan, while later that year he led a trade mission to China. Cheering crowds lined the road to his ancestral village, welcoming Locke and his family as heroes. "I was moved to tears when our motorcade went through the crowds," he said. "I'm very proud and touched that people would follow us from around the world and all over the country. It's so hard to fathom. I don't see myself as a trailblazer, I'm just an ordinary guy who likes to tinker with cars."

But tinkering didn't get Locke to the governor's mansion. He served as a state legislator for eleven years, including five years as chair of the powerful Appropriations Committee of the legislature. In 1993, he was elected chief executive of King County, which includes Seattle. It is the state's largest county and the thirteenth most populous in the nation. Locke's visible political presence inspired other Asian Americans to enter electoral politics, in the same way that others before him blazed his path. Kip Tokuda, former director of the Washington Council for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, ran for the state house in 1994 in part because of Locke. "As an agency head, I had to come to the capitol to lobby," said Tokuda, now a state representative. "On a subconscious level, it made a difference to deal with this bright Asian American. It took me out of an adversarial environment to where I didn't have to fight to be seen or heard. It gave me the idea that I could run for office, too."

In Washington State, Asian Americans have been on a steady climb to seek and win elective office. Their rise is the product of many years of political evolution that can be traced to the 1940s and 1950s. In 1960, the Asian American population of Seattle was less than 3 percent, but there were already visible political leaders from the community. Back then, a Chinese American named Ruby Chow was elected to the Seattle city council. So was Wing Luke, a city council member who was so popular that he was a top contender for mayor of Seattle in the early 1960s, a dream left unfulfilled when he was tragically killed in a plane crash in 1965.

By 1999, Washington State's Asian Americans were ahead of all other states except Hawaii in political representation, with three state representatives and one state senator, in addition to the governor's seat. In Seattle, the state's largest city, three of the nine city council members were Asian American. Their achievement is enviable compared to other mainland states including California, New York, Texas, Illinois, and New Jersey, which all have more Asian American residents than Washington but far

less to show. On the other hand, Washington's percentage of Asian Americans in the state population is higher than in every mainland state except California, which in 1997 was 12 percent, against Washington's 4 percent. Yet in 1999 California had only two Asian Americans in its state legislature, compared to the Evergreen State's four.

Washington's Asian American public officials are also unusually diverse. Among the five state-level officeholders, the four most numerous Asian American ethnicities are represented: Gary Locke is Chinese American; Kip Tokuda and Sharon Tomiko Santos are Japanese American; Velma Veloria is Filipino American; and Paull Shin, in the state senate, is Korean American. In 1999, Veloria and Santos were the only Asian American women to sit in any state legislature on the U.S. mainland.

The example established by the early, pioneering Asian American elected officials created opportunities for successive generations. "The mainstream got used to seeing Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in politics," said Martha Choe, who was serving her second four-year term as a Seattle city council member. "But we could only accomplish this by coalition building within the API [Asian and Pacific Islander] community and with other communities. With each APA [Asian Pacific American] candidate, the entire community has rallied, there's a real sense of pan-Asianness. We've always understood that, as a small minority in the state, we had to reach a wider constituency," said Choe. "The reaching out begins with our different Asian and Pacific Islander communities."

The communities are also reaching out politically. In 1996, three thousand Asian and Pacific Islander Americans went to the state capital to talk to their legislators about the impending federal welfare bill, urging them to treat immigrants and refugees fairly, in the face of cuts in vital benefits. As a result of their visits, Governor Locke and the legislators provided state aid to cover food stamps for poor immigrants. Ever since then, the Asian American community sends thousands to Olympia each year to show their political interest and build the relationship between the community and their elected officials.

The early Asian American political leaders used their positions to develop the next generation, a distinguishing hallmark of the Washington State Asian communities. One of those consistent political mentors is Ruth Oya Woo, a Japanese American Nisei who got a job as a receptionist for the mayor of Seattle in the early 1950s after being interned during World War

II. She spent many years as a campaign worker before she had an epiphany. "I realized that I had worked to elect all these white men. I wanted to get people elected who would do something for my community, who wouldn't treat us as suspects, to keep another interment from happening again."

The unassuming Woo, who runs a small licensing bureau in a South Seattle neighborhood strip mall, has used her expertise to guide the campaign strategies for almost every Asian American aspirant for elective office in the state of Washington, including Governor Locke. "We have to keep bringing young people into the political pipeline. When I meet students, I tell them, 'You're going to be the first Asian American Supreme Court justice,'" said Woo. Two of Woo's protégés have created their own programs to develop community skills and civic participation: state representative Kip Tokuda started a community institute to teach leadership skills, while King County District Court Judge Eileen Kato established a juvenile justice conference for Asian and Pacific Islander youths to learn about the law. Both have linked their work with national organizations: Tokuda's is modeled after the Leadership Education for Asian Pacific's public policy institute, while Kato developed her conference through the Asian Pacific American Women's Leadership Institute.

Elsewhere in the United States, such essential political foundations are still being developed. In New York City, where Asian Americans made up 8 percent of the population in 1997, the diverse community had yet to come together to elect the first Asian American to the city council. While he was a member of the Los Angeles city council, Michael Woo (not related to Ruth Woo) was the highest-ranking Asian American elected official of a major U.S. city. But when he stepped down from the city council to run for mayor in 1993, no Asian Americans were in place to run for his vacant seat. His defeat cost Asian Americans more than the mayor's office: there was no longer an Asian American voice at the policy level of city government in Los Angeles, where Asian Americans then numbered 11 percent of the city, equal to the population of African Americans.

If Asian Americans are to advance politically, they must understand the importance of building a broad base of support both within and beyond the ethnic community, according to political scientist Don Nakamishi, director of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center. At the same time, they also run the risk of paying less attention to their ethnic base.

Asian Americans in Washington State tried to push Governor Locke to be more outspoken on national controversies affecting the Asian ethnic communities. Privately they speculated whether he was playing it safe with his white constituency. Similar comments have been made about other Asian American elected officials.

"When you look at the elections of Congressman Robert Matsui, former Congressman Norman Mineta, and Governor Gary Locke, the percentage of Asians in their districts is minuscule," said Nakanishi. "They weren't elected by Asian voters. But if you look at their political histories, they were encouraged to run by other Asian Pacific Americans, the core that helped them to get elected at the city council level. They're in the kitchen cabinet, and the core of volunteers—from JACL chapters, church friends, or union members—who go door-to-door campaigning out in the community. There's definitely an Asian American connection for these guys. At the same time, their political careers depend on their ability to develop a broad base—it's necessary preparation for the next political office."

It's not easy for Asian Americans to make themselves visible and politically relevant when they are still considered peripheral to white-and-black society. In Washington State, as in California, Asian Americans have surpassed African Americans in population. But a surprising number of people still view Asian Americans as aliens. In 1997 and 1998, members of Congress advanced dozens of proposals to strip legal permanent residents of their right to political expression, including barring them from participation in the electoral process by handing out flyers, for example, or making campaign contributions. While Congress was working to limit the political rights of Asian Americans and other immigrant communities in this way, poor Asian Americans in San Francisco's public housing projects faced harassment and violent attacks by poor African Americans, motivated in part by the notion that Asians were not entitled to receive public assistance and live in public housing.

At times both blacks and whites have viewed Asian American advances as coming at their expense, prompting resentment from both. A recent study on perceived group competition by sociologists Lawrence Bobo and Vincent Hutchings found that whites feel least threatened by blacks and most threatened by Asians. Meanwhile, a *Los Angeles Times* survey found

that blacks identified Asians as the group they consider least trustworthy. Asian Americans are "intruders" in the white-black paradigm; it seems paradoxical that they are also anointed "honorary whites" because of their "model minority" status. Their presumed opposition to affirmative action postulates that they, like whites, are victimized by the advancement of blacks and Latinos. In the absence of clearly articulated Asian American views on such subjects, the opinions of others seeking to advance their own agendas are more readily imposed on and attributed to the Asian American community.

The battleground over affirmative action is a prime example of how the purported opinions of Asian Americans were bandied about by white and black pundits as a prominent part of the debate, while the Asian American community's voice was missing. A myth has evolved that most Asian Americans oppose affirmative action. It persists because Asian Americans make easy marks in the crossfire of black-white tensions, convenient surrogates to divert black frustration and white excuses. Though many individual Asian Americans may indeed oppose affirmative action, there are also a great many who support the policy and who have benefited from it.

The affirmative action myth was first promulgated in the media. An absence of supporting data didn't stop countless commentaries and reports from asserting Asian American opposition to affirmative action. On the eve of the elections that included a ballot measure on affirmative action in California, NBC network anchor Tom Brokaw speculated that Asian Americans might stay away from the polls because of the heavy emphasis on affirmative action and immigration. Even when the highly publicized nomination of Bill Lann Lee for U.S. assistant attorney general for civil rights was stalled because Lee had been an outspoken advocate for affirmative action, the contradiction with the presumed views of his Chinese American ethnic community was ignored.

There is no simple explanation for how the diverse Asian American communities respond to affirmative action in education, employment, and contracting, yet little if any effort has been expended to survey the varied multilingual, multiethnic community's perspectives. When all Asian Americans are assumed to share conservative white views, there is no need to bother. As a result, Asian Americans' views are underresearched and undersurveyed on this and other major policy issues.

But initial broad-based research studies have widely countered the

assumptions. The first tri-region, multilingual exit poll on the question was conducted in 1996, commissioned by the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC) in conjunction with its affiliates in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco and conducted by Larry Hajime Shinagawa, chair of American Multicultural Studies at Sonoma State University. The survey's main purpose was to test the need for bilingual voting information, in addition to the issue-related questions. A total of 4,650-plus Asian American voters in several heavily Asian voting areas of California and New York were surveyed at the polls on a variety of questions, with information and translators available in several Asian languages. Nine hundred and fifty voters were surveyed in four communities of Southern California—Koreatown, San Gabriel Valley, South Bay, and Little Saigon—and more than 500 were polled at San Francisco and Oakland sites. In New York, more than 3,200 voters at 14 sites in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens were questioned.

The results of the polling were startling. An overwhelming majority of Asian Americans opposed the 1996 California anti-affirmative action ballot initiative. In Northern California, 84.1 percent of the 500-plus Asian Americans polled voted against the anti-affirmative action measure. A similar pattern was found in Southern California, where 76 percent of the 950 Asian Americans polled voted no to ending affirmative action.

There were a number of other significant findings in the exit polling, which was intended more to identify concerns of immigrant, non-native-English-speaking Asian American voters than to highlight affirmative action or other specific ballot measures. "The primary reason we wanted to do the survey was to monitor the need for bilingual assistance at the voting booth," said Karen Narasaki, the executive director of NAPALC. "Bilingual assistance makes a difference. We see that in the numbers. This is a policy we need to defend to make sure that Asian Pacific Americans have a voice in the polls." Of the more than 4,650 voters polled, more than half in all three cities asked for and received Asian-language surveys to fill out. Access to Asian-language information was available in several Chinese dialects, Korean, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Japanese, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Bengali, and Malayalam, as well as English. Previous polls conducted by mainstream organizations had all been conducted in English, thereby missing the views of the majority of Asian American immigrants, who may not feel comfortable answering a telephone survey in English.

In contrast to their image as conservative and apathetic, most of the Asian Americans voted to support affirmative action. Further, in all three regions, they heavily supported Bill Clinton, the Democrat, over Bob Dole, the Republican. In New York, 71 percent voted for Clinton, 21 percent for Dole. The San Francisco vote was 83 to 9 percent, and Los Angeles County, 53 to 41 percent, Clinton over Dole. This Democratic tilt broke sharply with polls taken at previous elections by mainstream pollsters that queried limited numbers of Asian American voters, and solely in English. Those polls found that a majority of Asian Americans polled supported George Bush over Michael Dukakis in the 1988 presidential elections, and Bush again over Clinton in 1992. Other research found that, besides those who affiliate with Democrats or Republicans, between 20 and 30 percent of Asian American voters are independent, unaffiliated voters who may act as a swing vote. In 1996, the multilingual polls suggested a leftward swing.

The exit poll's remarkable findings failed to attract media attention despite the extensive coverage of affirmative action. Reporters and people with little knowledge of the Asian American experience have a hard time believing that Asian Americans can support affirmative action when they seem to outperform everyone in the classroom. In the logic of self-interest, Asian Americans ought to keep every available slot for themselves. But many Asian Americans have also had painful encounters with discrimination in employment and business, which share the central core of the affirmative action debate. In the early 1980s, Asian Americans for Affirmative Action was organized by scientific and technical professionals of AT&T and Bell Laboratories because of workplace discrimination, becoming one of the first Asian American employee organizations in the country created to address job bias. The glass ceiling is a lively topic among Asian Americans. Disparities for Asian Americans in the workplace are well documented in research data, although this distress passes unnoticed by non-Asian Americans.

The evolution of the affirmative action myth offers strategic pointers to Asian Americans on the road to political empowerment, particularly in the electoral arena where perception can mean everything. Even on issues for which a consensus may not exist, Asian Americans must find the resources to define, characterize, and put forth views on key policy issues, as the Japanese American Citizens League did on the issue of gay and lesbian marriage. Unless Asian Americans define ourselves, others will do so

to advance their own agendas, using Asian Americans as a shield or wedge on volatile race matters.

Race theorist Mari Matsuda issued this warning to Asian Americans in a speech to the San Francisco-based Asian Law Caucus in 1990: "For a variety of historical and cultural reasons, Asian Americans are particularly susceptible to being used by dominant society," said Matsuda, who teaches law at Georgetown University and is coauthor, with Charles Lawrence, of *We Won't Go Back: The Case for Affirmative Action*. "When Asian Americans manage to do well, their success is used against others. Internally, it is used to erase the continuing poverty and social dislocation within Asian American communities. Externally, our successes are used to deny racism and to put down other groups. Yes, we take pride in our success, but we should also remember the cost. I hope we will not be used to blame the poor for their poverty. Nor should we be used to deny employment or educational opportunity to others."

In the political trenches, Asian Americans have had to work particularly hard to dispel notions that their interests are identical to whites'. When the anti-affirmative action initiative known as I-200 was placed on the 1998 state ballot in Washington, Governor Gary Locke used his position as chief executive to stomp for affirmative action, even though the measure to reverse affirmative action passed by a large margin, as predicted. Asian Americans like Locke have succeeded in navigating this difficult racial terrain by articulating clear political stances.

Over the years, Locke and a number of prominent Asian American leaders have worked closely with black, Latino, and Native American groups. Their multiracial coalition was rooted in Seattle's past; because of a history of redlining and housing segregation, people of color lived in the same neighborhoods and attended the same schools of South Seattle. Familiarity turned into political action when activists from those communities called for the hiring of minority construction workers for the Seattle Kingdome in the 1960s. The same coalition provided multiracial community support for Filipino American cannery workers in the Wards Cove case. In the electoral arena, that cooperation helped elect an African American, Norman Rice, to be mayor of Seattle from 1989 to 1997, and Gary Locke as governor in 1996.

When Gary Locke sought the Democratic Party nod in the gubernatorial

torial race, his chief rival was Rice. Locke emerged as the clear victor, but there was always the danger that, as an Asian American, he might be seen as a usurper, particularly when the affirmative action and model minority imagery is so dominant. In an environment of racial myths, Asian Americans can political leaders find they have a special responsibility to reach out to other communities of color. For example, in 1999, two Asian Americans—Kip Tokuda and Sharon Tomiko Santos—were elected to represent South Seattle's 37th Legislative District, the same district that launched Governor Locke's political career. The district, which is about 30 percent black, 30 percent Asian, and 10 percent Hispanic, had traditionally produced African American legislators. "More Asians doesn't necessarily mean better, and there was some concern in the district whether two Asian Pacific Islander representatives could serve the diverse needs of the community," said Tokuda, a longtime activist for children and family services. "That's why we need to advocate for issues that transcend all boundaries." Tokuda met regularly with his African American constituents to discuss strategies to get blacks and other people of color elected in white enclaves.

"People say about the legislature, where are the blacks? We ask that, too," said Washington Representative Velma Veloria, a Filipino American first elected to the state house in 1992. "Just because Asian Americans are in the legislature doesn't mean we can stop coalition building. We have been pushing forward Hispanic and African American candidates. And if the elected positions aren't there, it's our responsibility to find positions in other departments to make sure all voices are at the table."

Even with their progress, Asian Americans in Washington State still feel the sting of racism. Gary Locke recalls overt racist remarks by other legislators when he was a state representative, during debates over redress for Japanese American state employees who were fired en masse during World War II. King County District Court Judge Eileen Kato was no stranger to racial slurs from angry defendants. "I get called a 'fucking Jap' in court," said Kato. "I give them fair warning. If they don't stop, I fine them and hold them in contempt. It's thirty days in jail for contempt. I learned this from a Chinese American judge. He warned one guy three times—ninety days in jail. It's just deserts."

Sometimes the bias is subtle, an attitude rather than a slur. But attitudes can bolster or undermine political efforts. "When I do something that people think is out of context for an Asian, my colleagues come up

and say, 'Wow, I can't believe you swore, you got in that guy's face!' " said State Representative Tokuda. "It really surprises people when they see me get tough, because so many still see me as the inscrutable, enigmatic Japanese. It's an image we need to change. But we also need to change as a people. We are opinionated—we need to be able to express ourselves and our political will."

In 1996, the political paths carved out in the course of fighting for redress, Wards Cove, and other issues were severely eroded when politically active Asian Americans around the nation became targets of racially charged investigations intended to uncover campaign finance abuses in the Clinton presidential campaign. The search quickly took on a partisan edge, and, as alleged illegal acts by a few Asian American fund-raisers emerged, conservative opinion leaders began to characterize their actions as an "infection . . . imported from China into the American political system."

Asian Americans community leaders were caught by surprise. UCLA's Don Nakanishi noted, "The 1996 elections were supposed to be the defining moment for Asian Pacific Americans in electoral politics. They were to be a celebration of a successful nationwide voter registration campaign that enfranchised thousands of new voters. Campaign fund-raising records were expected to be set by both Democrats and Republicans as they traveled along an increasingly lucrative circuit to mine the gold mountains of Asian America. And, maybe this time around, the President, in assembling a Cabinet that 'looks like America,' would appoint at least one Asian Pacific American. That's how the story was supposed to go."

In early 1996, Asian American political momentum gathered steam with a broad-based national "Get Out the Vote" campaign directed at the diverse Asian American communities. Young Asian American voters in particular were targeted. Spearheaded by the Organization of Chinese Americans, nineteen national Asian American organizations rolled out a national mobilization with a multilingual public service announcement that featured a *Who's Who* of Asian American show business celebrities, including Tamlyn Tomita, Russell Wong, Rosalind Chao, B. D. Wong, Ming-Na Wen, Dustin Nguyen, Jason Scott Lee, Amy Hill, Steve Park, Jenny Shimizu, Dean Cain, Mako, and Margaret Cho.

Besides the voter drive, Asian American political activists launched a vigorous fund-raising campaign intended to help win political recognition

for the Asian American community by President Bill Clinton's Administration. Little did they know how much attention they would receive. It was later determined that a small number of the Democratic fund-raisers made numerous violations of campaign finance law, including the acceptance of funds from Chinese government officials. But in the course of the investigation of the illegal acts committed by a few, the entire Asian American community was subjected to a level of political stigma and racial profiling it had not experienced since the 1940s and 1950s.

Asian Americans had donated under \$4 million, less than 0.2 percent of the \$2 billion raised in soft money for the 1996 presidential race, but they became the sole focus of the many investigations and media probes into improper campaign fund-raising. Thousands of news reports tracked the activities of Asian Americans in politics and government, from municipal politicians to career civil servants; numerous congressional committees of the House and the Senate, as well as the FBI, the Democratic National Committee, and countless news organizations, investigated the lives of a relatively small universe of Asian American donors and political activists.

As the investigative steamroller pursued Asian American donors, a major Dole fund-raiser, Simon Fireman, was fined \$6 million for violations—a fine that far exceeded the total money raised by Asian Americans. Sporadic coverage was given to Cuban drug money and to alleged money laundering by Thomas Kramer, a German who was not an American citizen, but these abuses received only cursory glances from the various governmental and news investigators.

For the next eighteen months, Asian Americans were subjected to a barrage of racial innuendos and slurs that questioned their loyalty to the United States, even suggesting they were "spies" and "influence peddlers" for China. Members of Congress, TV commentators, and newspaper editorial boards expressed their surprise, suspicion, and indignation that Asian Americans might set foot in the White House. To cite only a few examples: *Newsweek* invoked the "mysterious Asian-Americans," while Chris Matthews, a CNBC news show host and *San Francisco Examiner* Washington columnist, referred to Asian Americans as "all those strange characters from Asia." Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas faked a "Chinese" accent and said, "No raise money, no get bonus," and told the Washington Press Club Foundation, "Two Huangs don't make a right"—a

reference to Asian American John Huang, a fund-raiser for the Democratic National Committee who was under investigation for alleged campaign finance activities and as a possible operative for China. Senator Robert Bennett of Utah referred to "classic activities on the part of an Asian who comes out of that culture and who embarks on an activity related to intelligence gathering." Even perennial candidate H. Ross Perot made cracks about the "foreign-sounding" Asian American names: "Wouldn't you like to have someone out there named O'Reilly? So far we haven't found an American name."

The intensity and swiftness of the political and media juggernaut stunned Asian Americans. Some of the community's most politically active leaders and organizations came under investigation, implicated by their Asian ancestry. The roundup was pan-Asian in scope—suspects included Americans with ancestry in Taiwan, Korea, India, China, Indonesia, and Thailand—all presumed to be potential spies for the People's Republic of China. Civil rights groups such as the Organization of Chinese Americans, numerous private citizens, and prominent members of high-profile groups such as the Committee of 100 were forced to defend themselves against veiled accusations. Yvonne Lee, a commissioner for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, was stopped and interrogated while buying a gift at the White House souvenir shop. A reporter for a national news organization asked U.S. Senate candidate Matt Fong, a fourth-generation Californian whose mother, March Fong Eu, was a U.S. ambassador, "If the United States and China became engaged in a conflict, where would your loyalties lie?"

When Asian American leaders protested the tenor of the news, they, too, were accused: a *Boston Globe* editorial called complaints of racial stereotyping "a shabby maneuver to avoid scrutiny." An editorial by *The Washington Post* declared that "the idea of 'Asian bashing' has been floated in [John Huang's] defense. This was then and still is a variant on what is otherwise often known as 'playing the race card,' . . . shaming those who are pursuing Mr. Huang's alleged violations of the law suggesting that they are acting out of racial bias"; in a meeting with the *Post*'s editorial board, the concerns raised by the directors of national Asian American organizations were met with scorn. The attitude of several news establishments was that if you criticize their coverage of Asian American donors, then you, too, must be guilty of wrong-doing.

Inside the Washington Beltway, people of Asian heritage turned into personae non gratae. Career civil servants, elected officials, representatives of community advocacy groups, political appointees, party loyalists, even college interns seeking experience in the nation's capital found themselves suddenly isolated and unwelcome political liabilities. Community meetings, organized by Francey Lim Youngberg, then executive director of the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies, were held in several cities to discuss the avalanche of accusations. Professor Frank Wu of Howard University School of Law, an outspoken critic of the racial inequity, captured the sense of Asian Americans when he entitled his research paper on the subject "Have You No Shame?"

Neurologist Suzanne Ahn from Dallas, Texas, who described her family's cumulative donations to both Democratic and Republican parties as "in the six figures," said that she and her family members were interrogated by the FBI, the Democratic National Committee auditors, and the news media, who obtained their names from the DNC when the Ahn family refused to give their Social Security numbers. Ahn's sister-in-law, a Korean American, was accused in the media of being a foreign agent. "My God, I've got an FBI file now and all because I had given money and my family had given money to politicians who have turned out to be fair-weather friends and ungrateful hypocrites," said Ahn. "Now, I'm not saying that what [the fund-raisers] did was right or wrong, but when the white men violate a campaign rule, there is an investigation, there is a fine . . . There isn't this maligning of the whole race."

Los Angeles-based attorney Anthony Ching was told by the DNC investigators that his \$5,000 contribution to Clinton's reelection campaign would be "invalidated" if he didn't cooperate, so he asked for his money back. That same day, he received another call from the DNC soliciting funds for Clinton's reelection inauguration. My brother Hoyt, who was a captain in the U.S. Marine Corps and went to Washington to work as a Clinton appointee, became a target of investigators and was accused of being a "China connection" by far-right publications such as *The American Spectator* because he spoke up against the investigations—and he is Chinese American.

For Asian Americans who trace their histories in the United States back a generation or more, there was a real sense of déjà vu. The willingness of people to associate Americans of Asian descent with spying, cor-

ruption, "dual loyalties," and other sundry un-American acts was reminiscent of the war hysteria of the 1940s, when all Japanese American families on the West Coast had their household cameras and maps confiscated and Japanese American farmers were accused of planting their crops in patterns that would aid Japanese airplanes in case of an air attack. The Asian Americans who came to the United States after the 1965 Immigration Act got a firsthand lesson in how quickly today's model minority could become tomorrow's demon despised.

Gary Locke won his election as governor of Washington during this investigatory fervor, a bright spot in an otherwise ugly political climate in America. Lists of contributors to Locke's political campaign were also scrutinized for Asian-appearing names. His campaign ended up paying \$2,500 in fines to the state campaign commission for violations involving about \$5,300 in cash donations that exceeded the \$50 cash donation limit set by Washington State; for failing to deposit the money within the time allowed; and for failing to report the names and addresses of twenty-three donors on time. No charges of foreign influence peddling were made. The cost of the investigations into his contributors far exceeded the amount questioned.

"This whole campaign financing scandal has caused a lot of Asian Americans to hunker down and shy away from politics, and that's very unfortunate," said Locke. "Mistakes were made. We made mistakes and immediately self-reported and then still got lumped in with the issues nationwide. It's distressing, but you just have to keep moving on. The last thing Asian Americans can afford to do is to shy away from politics."

For more than a year, the racial drumbeat continued to pound out of Washington, D.C. Adding to the sense of siege were a number of high-profile acts of violence against Asian Americans. In the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, there was a rash of anti-Asian graffiti and hate violence in both public housing projects and well-to-do suburbs. At a Denny's restaurant in Syracuse, New York, on April 11, 1997, a group of seven Asian American college students who were kept waiting to be seated were attacked and beaten by white male Denny's patrons while the restaurant management and security stood by and watched. Two of the students, one of whom was a young woman, were beaten unconscious and had to be hospitalized. It was the most severe and violent racial incident at Denny's

in the country, though it received far less attention compared to other complaints against Denny's.

In the staid middle-class suburb of Rohnert Park, California, a thirty-three-year-old Taiwanese American, Kuan-chung Kao, was gunned down on the night of April 28, 1997, in his driveway by police, as his wife and four-year-old daughter watched in horror. Kao was drunk and swinging a stick, which, to justify the shooting, the police said he held "ninja-style." The police handcuffed the dying man and threatened to arrest Kao's wife, a registered nurse, when she rushed to her husband's side to provide medical treatment. A broad coalition led by Victor M. Hwang of the Asian Law Caucus called for a federal civil rights investigation of the Rohnert Park police after local officials ruled the homicide to be justifiable.

Asian Americans realized they needed bold and incisive political action to derail the assaults and to give Asian Americans a sense that they could fight back against the national whirlwind. The days of playing it safe by lying low and weathering the storm were over. Two San Francisco civil rights attorneys, Edward M. Chen and Dale Minami, initiated a legal complaint to the United States Commission on Civil Rights on behalf of fourteen national Asian American organizations and four individual political donors, charging members of Congress and public officials, the Democratic National Committee, the National Republican Senatorial Committee, and the news media of systematic bias, stereotyping, and scapegoating of Asian Pacific Americans.

After months of discussions with numerous Asian American leaders, Chen and Minami issued fifty pages of documented charges at a news conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on September 11, 1997. Organizing a legal complaint that unified the outrage and concerns of the widely divergent Asian American community wasn't easy. Professor Ling-chi Wang, chair of the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of California at Berkeley and founder of Asian Americans for Campaign Finance Reform, also brought attention to the role of Asian business conglomerates and governments and their attempts to influence Asian American communities. His campaign finance reform group supported the petition, a sign of the broad desire for a national Asian American response to Congress and the media.

As a result of the petition, on December 5, 1997, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights chair Mary Frances Berry conducted a national briefing to

hear testimony on the charges. More than twenty Asian Americans and others from across the country gave testimony, marking the first time in more than a year of accusations that Asian Americans had the chance to state our case. As a journalist who monitored the media coverage of the issue, I made a statement detailing my own research for the petition. I found that the careers of dedicated civil servants were damaged, that idealistic college students seeking a Washington experience were being stopped and questioned as they gazed at the White House with other tourists. In my testimony, I noted—most disturbing to me about the media fairness issue—the lack of voice given to the Asian American viewpoint by the very institutions entrusted to protect free speech.

The hard-fought effort to bring an Asian American viewpoint to the public had an impact: the racialized tone of the congressional hearings and the news reports began to lessen—at least temporarily. Asian Americans won a small victory and gained a valuable education. Few would have predicted the momentum and ferocity of the campaign finance storm, or the tremendous effort it would take to counter its force. It was a dramatic reminder that money and promises of political influence alone could not substitute for strength that comes from political education and organizing at the grass-roots level.

The campaign finance investigation was the most public broadside aimed at the Asian American communities, but it wasn't the only serious threat at the end of the 1990s. Congress moved to cut off medical care, education, food stamps, and other vital services to immigrants who, for whatever reason, had not become citizens—including both legal and undocumented immigrants, neonates and elderly, regardless of how long they had resided in the United States. With almost 70 percent of the Asian American population foreign-born, Asian Americans were hit harder than most communities. Contrary to the model minority image, many Asian Americans were reliant on those supports. As the cutoffs of benefits and services became imminent, there were widespread reports of suicides and panic among elderly Asian Americans—legal, tax-paying permanent residents, many of whom had paid into the Social Security system for years.

Throughout 1997, Asian Americans leaders gathered in search of new strategies. At conferences organized by the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies and the Organization of Chinese Ameri-

cans, community leaders from around the country argued emotionally for more aggressive, visible action from the Washington-based Asian American groups. But Asian Americans were hampered by the lack of a national, grass-roots-driven advocacy organization like the NAACP or the National Organization for Women. To create a rapid response to community crisis, more than twenty Asian American groups and numerous individuals founded a new organization, the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans.

Suddenly there was a profusion of new Asian American organizations. Within the same year, 1997, several national Asian and Pacific Islander American organizations were created. The National Federation of Filipino American Associations united three thousand Filipino American organizations together under one umbrella. The Filipino Civil Rights Advocates (FILCRA) has injected a Filipino American presence into civil rights issues, with a prominent campaign to obtain full GI veterans benefits for Filipino Americans who fought in World War II, and to press for an end to sweatshop labor in the Northern Mariana Islands, a U.S. Commonwealth. The Korean American Coalition (KAC) opened a Washington, D.C., office to create national visibility for Korean Americans. Numerous other organizations organized and reorganized during this same period.

Across the country, Asian Americans sought new ways to mobilize their communities. In several Southern states from Florida to Texas, resurgent Asian Americans, complete with Southern accents, are asserting their presence. A pan-Asian American coalition in Houston, Texas, has become an effective voice in City Hall—with South Asian and Southeast Asian leaders as well as East Asian Americans. In Dallas, ethnic-specific Asian business groups dissolved and merged to form a single Asian American Chamber of Commerce. "Politics is local; we have to show the nexus between the national strategy and the local. We have to make the connection," said Warren Furutani, director of the Office of Asian Pacific Islander American Affairs of the California Speaker of the Assembly.

The new groups didn't hesitate to use vigorous, even militant, tactics. In one bold action, Filipino American World War II veterans, elderly men in their seventies, marched on Washington, D.C., in the July 1997 summer heat and chained themselves to the fence surrounding the White House, many proudly dressed in military uniform. They were calling on Congress to end its stalling and give 70,000 Filipino American World War II veter-

ans the pensions and benefits that every other allied veteran who fought under U.S. command receives. The new organizations extended the reach of the national and local network of organizations. Pan-Asian American linkages were also established when Vietnamese, Lao, and Hmong American veterans of U.S. wars joined the Filipino Americans' efforts for equal veterans benefits. Their goals are the same: to receive the same respect as all other veterans who fought under the U.S. flag.

More groups and voices have also created more opportunities for conflict. In San Francisco, where 33 percent of the city's population is of Chinese descent, and about 40 percent Asian American, an upstart group of Chinese Americans who are part of the post-1965 immigration managed to upend city politics. Using Cantonese- and Mandarin-speaking radio stations and the Chinese-language press, the San Francisco Neighbors' Association mobilized 30,000 Chinese voters to support a 1997 ballot measure that nearly all of the city's power brokers opposed, including some Chinese Americans. According to *A. Magazine*, their tactics include personal attacks over Chinese radio against all who oppose them, allegedly calling Chinese clients of the Asian Law Caucus "human garbage" and accusing a Chinese American city supervisor of being a Communist for supporting tenants' rights. The insurgents' proven ability to get out the vote has brought them considerable political clout in the city and is radically altering Chinese American politics in San Francisco.

Another fractious conflict raged in the Vietnamese American community of Little Saigon in Westminster, California. A Vietnamese businessman hung a poster of Ho Chi Minh and a flag of the Communist government of Vietnam in his video store. For several months in 1999, up to 10,000 demonstrators protested outside his store—aging veterans in military fatigues; former political prisoners, hauling re-creations of P.O.W. "tiger cages" in tow to underscore the torture and imprisonment they suffered at the hands of the North; grandmothers carrying placards. Comparing the store display to waving a Nazi flag in a Jewish neighborhood, the angry, anti-Communist protesters became regular fixtures on the news. But the issue was not so clear-cut for most Vietnamese Americans, whose families come from both the North and South of Vietnam. Over the course of the protest, police arrested fifty-two people and spent more than \$200,000 in overtime. Anti-Communist sympathy demonstrations were held in other cities with sizable Vietnamese American populations—San Jose, New Orleans, and Houston. After the video store closed down for unrelated reasons, protesters directed

their anger at Tony Lam, a Westminster city council member who in 1994 had become the country's first Vietnamese American elected official, because he didn't show enough support for the protest.

Conflicts and all, the dynamic emergence of bold voices and new organizations and leadership marks the continuing evolution of the Asian American community. "At what point do you stop seeing yourself as a minority group that's too small to have divergent views?" asked Lillian Galledo, co-chair of FILCRA. "It is a sign of our growth and maturity to accept that we're all here to stay and we have common goals that we may approach in different ways."

At the start of the new millennium, Asian American students are a visible and vocal population on nearly every college campus, from the ivy-covered schools in the Northeast to public colleges and universities across the United States. The Asian American college population can be attributed in part to the high value that Asian Americans place on education for their children, combined with the demographics of the post-1965 Asian American immigration boom.

Asian American students constituted 6 percent of all American college students in 1999, but their sizable presence at the nation's top universities and programs made their impact seem much greater. Since the 1960s, there has been an explosive increase in the numbers of Asian American students, particularly after a federal investigation in the 1980s into complaints of more stringent admissions standards and quota limits for Asian Americans at elite schools such as Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, Brown, and Berkeley.

At the height of campus movements in 1969, Asian American students at Berkeley made up about 5 percent of the student body; in 1998, 41 percent of Berkeley's undergraduates were of Asian descent, compared to 31 percent white students. UC Irvine in Southern California topped the list with 58 percent of its student body Asian American. At some campuses Asian American students struggle to get even one course on Asian American topics, yet twenty-four schools offer full Asian American studies programs, thirteen have Asian American studies within another department, and ten offer regular Asian American studies courses. While most of these programs must struggle to continue, they are a concrete indication that the need exists and progress has been made.

With such numbers comes a tremendous potential strength that is also new and untested. Not only has the population of Asian American college

students ballooned but so has the breadth of their concerns. Students are organizing and holding conferences on every conceivable issue and seeking recognition for their identities as they define themselves. The numerous mixed-race students, the children from the high proportion of Asian American interracial marriages, have asserted their presence and are altering the conversation of what it means to be Asian American. Korean adoptee students helped plan the first national conference of Korean adoptees and their families in 1999, reaching out to the 100,000-some Koreans who were adopted and mostly raised by European American families.

An upsurge in campus activism by Asian American college students offers the most exciting preview of the community's political future, as colleges and universities become the training ground for the new generation that is insisting on a place in society as Asian Americans. A new generation is storming the bastions over the same issues that pulled Asian Americans together as a American people three decades earlier.

In April 1999, Asian American students at the University of California at Berkeley joined with other students in a multiracial coalition to fight cutbacks in the very ethnic studies program created by student strikes at Berkeley and San Francisco State in 1968. Berkeley students began a hunger strike to protest the cutting of such courses as Chinese American history, Latino politics, and Native American history. During their peaceful hunger strike in the heart of the campus, more than one hundred students were arrested, including a number of Asian Americans. By the strike's ninth day, the university administration agreed to meet student demands to restore the ethnic studies program to its world-class reputation.

On May 3, 1999, at the University of Texas at Austin—just hours before the mass arrests at Berkeley—ten Asian American students were charged with criminal trespass and were arrested for refusing to leave a campus administration building. The students, members of the Asian American Relations Group, were seeking to speak with Judith Langlois, the interim dean of the College of Liberal Arts. Langlois had overturned the hiring of a director for the university's new Asian American studies program, which students had been seeking for five years. The following day, more than five hundred students rallied on campus to protest the arrests and to demand that the administration drop the charges against the students.

The student actions at Berkeley and UT Austin were the latest in a wave of campus activism for Asian American studies programs. A few years earlier, Columbia students staged a hunger strike to obtain Asian

American and Latino studies. Asian American students took over buildings at Cornell and Stanford, held rallies at Harvard, and staged a hunger strike at Northwestern. For a two-month period in 1997, Asian American students at the University of Maryland at College Park held regular rallies and marches. At Mills College in Oakland, California, Asian American students at the all-women's school have been waging a long campaign to get Asian Americans and other professors of color added to the faculty and to obtain tenure for the few who have taught there.

At Princeton University, my alma mater, seventeen Asian American and Latino students took over the offices of the president at Nassau Hall in 1995, much as I had "occupied" the library during my first year to win recognition for students of color. In response to the Nassau Hall sit-in, the university promised that tenure-track faculty would be hired and regular courses on the Asian American and Latino American experiences offered. By 1999, the university still offered just one Asian American course per semester—not much of an increase over the number of courses that we mustered twenty-five years earlier. But in 1970 there were barely 40 Asian Americans on the campus, including faculty. In 1999, there were more than 400 Asian American students, about 14 percent of the student body.

One of Princeton's new crop of Asian American student leaders was William Huen, whose father, Floyd, was one of the Asian American strike leaders at Berkeley in the 1960s. This new generation has come around full circle, but with more political tools and sophistication than their parents had.

Many will take their energies back into the community. They might be among the young Asian Americans working on environmental justice with Laotian teenage girls in the Asian Pacific Environmental Network who live next door to chemical refineries in Richmond, California; leading street actions against posh boutiques and athletic shoe stores, in conjunction with groups such as Asian Immigrant Women Advocates, to expose designers, manufacturers, and retailers who rely on sweatshop labor; getting trained as organizers by unions or groups like the Center for Third World Organizing; becoming safer-sex educators for HIV/AIDS programs; creating innovative programs for such women's groups as the Asian Women's Shelter in San Francisco to teach survivors of domestic violence about homophobia and hate violence; and becoming involved in any number of other grass-roots community efforts. These young Asian American leaders are stepping forward with a confidence and sense of their own

self-worth and empowerment that their elders can only marvel at. They are the Asian American leadership for the new millennium.

Some will enter the arena of electoral politics, bringing the leadership and vision of Asian Americans to the mainstream and all Americans. When UCLA Asian American Studies Center director Don Nakanishi first began tracking Asian Pacific Americans in the electoral process in 1978, he could count only a couple of hundred names, mostly in Hawaii and California. "The list was so small I could Xerox and staple it at the top. Now there are more than two thousand elected and major appointed officials in over thirty states. Between 1996 and 1998 there was a 10 percent increase in Asian Pacific American candidates running for political office." The setbacks of 1996 and 1997 turned into a shared resolve to push forward on the political front.

By 1998, more than 300 Asian American and Pacific Islanders were elected to office in the United States and its territories, according to Nakanishi's 1998-99 *National Asian Pacific American Political Almanac*. Not only were more Asian American and Pacific Islander candidates running for public office and winning, but candidates were also emerging from less represented communities, broadening the political leadership base of Asian Americans beyond Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans. In 1994, Ram Yoshino Uppuluri ran in the Democratic primary for a seat in Congress representing Tennessee. Uppuluri, whose father is Indian American and mother Japanese American, brought visibility to the growing numbers who have mixed pan-Asian ethnic heritage. In St. Paul, Minnesota, Neal Thao, a 1.5-generation Hmong American attorney, was elected to the Board of Education in 1998; he followed the path of Choua Lee, becoming the second Hmong elected to political office in the United States.

In contrast to the days not long past when Asian Americans had to worry that they would be stigmatized for associating with other Asians, Governor Gary Locke stumped in neighboring Oregon for another Asian American candidate. In 1998 David Wu won election to the U.S. House of Representatives and became the first Taiwan-born American to be elected to Congress. Like other Asian American candidates, Wu ran on a campaign that appealed to Oregon voters of all backgrounds, not just the 2 percent who were Asian American. An Op-Ed piece entitled "Race Politics a Non-starter for Asian Americans" ran in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in May 1999. It admonished Asian Americans not to get involved in race mat-

ters—using David Wu as a model. But Wu was not one to shy away from issues that might bring attention to his ethnicity. Shortly after taking office, he spoke on the floor of the House, boldly cautioning his colleagues against racial profiling when spy allegations were made against Chinese research scientists. Later, Wu introduced a bill asking for a "sense of the Congress that generalizing or stereotyping the actions of an individual to an entire group of people is not acceptable to Congress, and that Americans of Asian ancestry are entitled to all rights and privileges afforded to all Americans."

The renewed spy allegations that erupted in 1999 over Los Alamos scientist Wen Ho Lee, a Chinese American, may catalyze another surge in Asian American political activity. Many are angered over the mounting evidence that Lee was scapegoated and accused of the high crime of espionage because of his ethnicity, calling it a national disgrace that he and the estimated 200,000 to 300,000 Asian American researchers and engineers, including Nobel Prize winners and many leading American scientists, have had their loyalties, reputations, and livelihoods severely damaged. When Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore snubbed a national conference of Asian American political leadership in Washington, D.C., in May 1999 sponsored by the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies, a number of Asian American political activists began discussing how to leverage their power independent of either political party. "The parties want to dance with us from a distance, so we're going to have to make our own music," said Vida Benavides, former director of public liaison for the Democratic National Committee.

Greater involvement and visibility of Asian Americans at political leadership levels cannot come soon enough. After an avowed neo-Nazi white supremacist shot and wounded several people at a Jewish community day care center in Los Angeles and then killed Joseph Iletto, a thirty-nine-year-old Filipino American postal worker, on August 10, 1999, shoddy treatment by politicians and news reporters compounded the Iletto family's pain. For several days after the rampage, news organizations around the country failed to report Iletto's name, ethnicity, and race or to consider the murder a hate crime, even though it was the fifth high-profile hate killing of an Asian American in 1999, and even when Asian American journalists pointed out the omissions in their newsrooms. At his own news event about gun control, with Joseph Iletto's family seated in the front row,

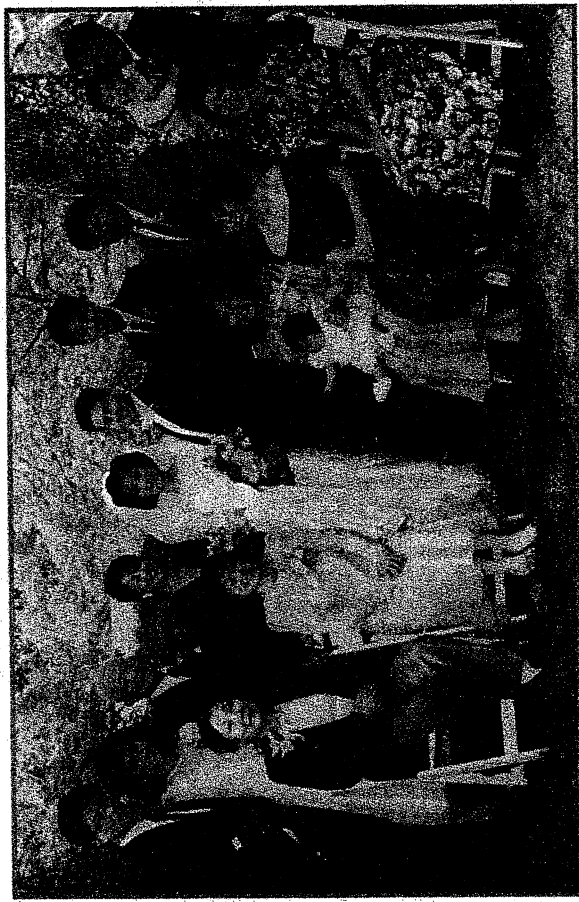
California Governor Gray Davis spoke only about the anti-Semitic nature of the attack, not once mentioning the slaying of the Asian American. President Clinton, in his statements on the hate crime, also failed to mention Ito or the anti-Asian killing until the Ito family told acting Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Bill Lann Lee how upset they were with the President. "Both the governor and the President said that their staffs didn't inform them," said Ismael Ito, brother of the victim. It is unacceptable that those who represent all the people should be so ill informed about their Asian American constituents, and the solution is clear: Asian Americans need to be at every leadership table.

The 10 million Asian Americans, who made up nearly 4 percent of America at the end of the twentieth century, will double in size by 2010. We are the fastest-growing racial group in the country, and we have a young population, with median age of 31.2 years, 4.0 years younger than the median for the U.S. population as a whole, according to the United States Census Bureau. While some 11 percent of Asian Americans live in poverty, we also have the highest proportion of college graduates of any racial or ethnic group, at 42 percent. This compares with 25 percent for whites, 13 percent for African Americans, and 10 percent for Hispanics. We are a people who are looking forward.

Our demographics and achievements, trials and tribulations, tell a compelling story of a people who come together from markedly different backgrounds, without a common language or culture. Many have braved unspeakable horrors to join in this multiracial democracy. Out of numerous disparate, even hostile, Asian ethnicities, we have forged a sense of shared experience and common future as Americans—Asian and Pacific Islander Americans.

From the Vincent Chin case to the Los Angeles riots, from the salmon canneries of Alaska to the ballot boxes of Hawaii, from the stage and screen to the college campus, we are a people in constant motion, a great work in progress, each stage more faceted and complex than before. As we overcome adversity and take on new challenges, we have evolved. Our special dynamism is our gift to America. As we transform ourselves, so we are transforming America.

Living Our Dreams



I was very fortunate to grow up amid tales of ghosts and demons, stories of the rich sights and smells of an ancient and thriving civilization that was unlike anything in my daily American life, yet so natural I could imagine this place called China without stepping outside my small New Jersey town. Mom sang lulling Chinese lullabies whose melodies and lyrics I could repeat but not comprehend.

When my father wasn't railing against Mao or Chiang or the U.S. government's Cold War policy toward China, he recited the poetry of Li Shuangyin, whom he considered superior to Li Po and Tu Fu, the most celebrated poets of China, and finer than William Butler Yeats and Percy Bysshe Shelley, whose poems he also loved. He'd match theirs against Li's stanza by stanza, in the tradition of Chinese poetry slams. Taking his

The Zia family at my sister Humane's wedding in 1989. Standing, left to right: Haddon, Cee Han, Dad, the author, Humane, Kevin, Hoyt, Henry, Hugo (and baby Frank); seated: Auntie Betty, Mom, Leigh-Ann (and baby Emily), Camille, Dorothy

favorite line from Shelley, "When winter comes, can spring be far behind?" he would discuss its merits compared to Li's couplet in Chinese: "Lotus leaves grow, spring sorrow blooms;/Lotus leaves wither, autumn sorrow advances." At those moments I would have gladly traded in my American accent and "good English" to understand the Chinese classics.

If I fell sick with fever, my mother came to my bedside with a large spoon and a dish filled with lukewarm cooking oil. I would yell, "No, not the Chinese treatment!" As I lay facedown with my back exposed, Mom dipped the broad edge of the spoon in the oil, then slowly and repeatedly scraped it hard along each of my ribs, until my back was a canvas of red zebra stripes. The process was as painful as it looked. I'd cry out, tears in my eyes, but within hours, my fever would break. Every time.

These special parts of my life were private, even secret—the bicultural, bisected Asian side of my upbringing that I didn't share with my outer, American world. Some things, like the "Chinese treatment," were likely to be misunderstood, even labeled child abuse. But my own inhibitions were unconscious and deep. My Chinese side was so personal that I actively blocked any risk of potential ridicule, embarrassment, and shame.

I became aware of this tension when I was twelve. For a brief time I had a pen pal, another twelve-year-old, from Edinburgh, Scotland. The Brainiac computer at the New York World's Fair matched us according to our age and interests. We exchanged the usual musings of preadolescent girls—school, vacations, the books we read, and pop music, probably the Beatles. I looked forward to her letters from Scotland with anticipation. After a few exchanges, my pen pal sent me pictures of herself and her family. Suddenly I had a problem. Of course she would expect pictures of me—and somehow I had neglected to mention that I was Chinese American.

I didn't try to hide my Chineseness from my pen pal—it wasn't something that seemed to matter, until the pictures. I took my cues from the world around me, the TV shows and movies I saw, the books and magazines I read. I had become a member of the Invisible Society of Asian Americans. With my pen pal, I made my Chinese self invisible. Her pictures forced me to decide how to share the news, a prospect that filled me with self-conscious dread. With my twelve-year-old's logic, I was certain that my pen pal would reject me, since, after all, she had wanted an American pen pal, not a Chinese one.

To spare myself from this imagined disappointment, I never wrote back. My decision made me feel cowardly and ashamed. I didn't want to make my Chinese self vulnerable, or to risk feeling less American than I already did. As a kid, I didn't know the meaning of internalized racism and self-hate, but I knew I didn't feel self-love.

I count myself lucky. I eventually discovered a community intent on asserting its Asian American identity and reclaiming its history and contributions to building America—a heritage that every American should know. This knowledge helped me to meld my Asian and American identities and to see that they were never really separate. I could now envision my future in a society that could include the ghosts and demons, songs and poems of my childhood.

The issue of what to keep private and internal to the community and what is appropriate to expose to the outside has not gone away. The potential for misunderstanding and more harmful consequences is still very real.

Not long ago, the question arose in an on-line members' E-mail discussion of the Asian American Journalists Association. Someone from Michigan posted an E-mail objecting to a statement made on a late-night TV talk show by an Asian American actor, Hawaii-born Kelly Hu, costar of the 1999 hit TV show *Married Law*. The talk show host pulled out a can of Spam, a staple in Hawaii. He ragged on the questionable animal parts that make up the canned meat product, in a predictable gag about foods that Asians eat. He dared Hu to eat some. The actor scoffed back. "Come on!" she said. "I come from a people who eat monkey brain."

The E-mail posting, critical of Hu's reference to eating monkey brains, triggered diverse reactions. Some felt the criticism was an overreaction, that Asian Americans need to lighten up and laugh at our own stereotypes. A journalist from California wrote back, noting that many Americans are too willing to use such casual comments as weapons of contempt, evidence that we don't belong in America. A writer from Honolulu referred to a time in Hawaii's recent past when Asians Americans of different ethnicities could laugh at each other, with each other; those times had given way to greater sensitivity and sophistication, she said, but in the process some of the naturalness and spontaneity had been lost.

My reaction was mixed. I added my own grist to the on-line mill, writing, in part:

These days I am wishing that we Asian Americans could be less self-conscious and more open and outspoken about ourselves, who we are really, as perhaps Kelly Hu was doing. To fight the stereotyping, I wish that AAJA and our community could speed up this glacially slow process of getting more and more Asian American voices of all kinds out there. If stereotyping is seeing people in one dimension, then our best solution is to blast out the full, rich multidimensional picture.

When I was a child, my mother talked about eating monkey brains. Not her, a Shanghaiese, but the Cantonese. She said that a long time ago, the Cantonese served the monkeys at special tables with little holes through which the tops of their heads protruded. Now, I have no idea if this is true, or if it was a Shanghaiese-Cantonese thing, but it was a part of my family folklore.

Two years ago, my partner Lia and I were on a China South-eastern Airlines jet to Chongqing. They had an in-flight magazine, in Chinese and English. Lia turned to the food section and found a recipe for "Ambrosial Puppy Stew." We looked at each other in disbelief and read on. Yes, it explained which puppies were tastiest (yellow ones) and, yes, how to cook them. It upset me, not just because of poor Spot, but also because I had spent much of my adult life screaming "We don't eat dogs!" at rude bozos. Yet, illustrated and in color, in English and Chinese, indeed some of us do.

Everyone has similar stories about strange, maligned food from their own cultures—haggis, steak tartare, chitlins, maggot cheese, head cheese, and so on. Would I share my examples of Chinese extreme cuisine on TV? Probably not, unless there was an opportunity to give the full context—an unlikely scenario on TV. And that's too bad, because if we can't understand and try to appreciate each other's sustenance, then how will we ever really know one another?

I have to confess that I was conflicted about including this "insider" discussion here. As I mulled this over, the memory of my pen pal came flooding back. Will Asian Americans be forever censoring ourselves, fearful of how we might be reinterpreted and misconstrued by "outsiders"—other Americans? When will we feel safe enough to project our whole selves? If not in the benign context of my own book, when? The path

ahead, blazed by so many bold and daring Asian Americans whose words and deeds have carved a place in America for us, is clear. To be seen, we must make ourselves visible, showing blemish as well as beauty.

Greater visibility also brings the responsibility of holding others accountable for their characterizations, so that the blemishes of individuals aren't applied to an entire people, whether the transgression involves unusual food or improper campaign fund-raising or working in high-security jobs. Unfortunately, there is no dearth of examples—innocent, ignorant, or malicious—that illustrate the disturbing willingness of otherwise intelligent people to suspend common sense when it comes to Asians.

One article that I've kept to remind me of this point ran on January 20, 1984, in the *Detroit Free Press*. The story, "Peking Headlights Get the Green Light," was reported by a member of the Knight Ridder foreign staff about Beijing's decision to make cars use headlights at night, instead of parking lights. The article contained the following lines: "Most Chinese are still not comfortable with the car. There is no word for automobile in Chinese."

Now, China has had cars on its soil from the time that the Model T rolled off the assembly line. Even I, a culturally deprived ABC, knew the Chinese word for car. I sent the following note, which was printed in the letters to the editor column:

Shame on the Detroit Free Press for running this ridiculous article which perpetuates the notion that Asian people are peculiarly different from the rest of the "civilized" world. Yes, the Chinese have a word for car. It is qi-che in Mandarin. The Chinese also build cars, as the writer must have known. There are words for train (huo-che), plane (fei-ji), buses, and even rockets (remember, the Chinese invented them). It is unfortunate that someone who is ignorant of China and the Chinese language is writing about one-fourth of the world's population.

The paper's executive editor then, David Lawrence, sent me a personal note:

Dear Helen Zia: Your point is excellent and I'll share it with others here. That paragraph, pure and simple, should not have run. I'm

glad you took the time to point it out. When you spot such and point them out to us, you do us a favor. We do learn from our mistakes.

It is a source of great frustration to Asian Americans, particularly those of us who are journalists, that modern-day American journalism is still replete with news of the "strange and exotic Asians" ilk. At first glance, such coverage may seem harmless, like the November 1998 article in *The New York Times*, "Lost, and Gained, in the Translation," about American movie titles that get distorted in foreign-language translations, particularly in Asian countries. "George of the Jungle" in Chinese supposedly became "Big Dumb Monkey Man Keeps Whacking Trees With Genitals"; "Batman and Robin": "Come to My Cave and Wear This Rubber Codpiece, Cute Boy." And "Barb Wire," starring Pamela Anderson Lee: "Delicate Orbs of Womanhood Bigger Than Your Head Can Hurt You." I laughed when I read the story and wondered out loud how it could possibly be true. Sure enough, *The New York Times* had to retract the story—the translations were a hoax and the writer took the bait. Of course, mistakes happen. Then again, the same writer authored one of the more stereotype-laden editorials about Asian Americans and Chinese Americans during the campaign finance scandal. Could there be a connection, an inclination or predisposition to look at things Asian in a certain light? Many Asian Americans think so. I do.

Where is the line between the "strange and exotic" and the "Asian Invasion/Yellow Peril"? The most harmful and malicious reports cover the whole spectrum of racialized commentary. As congressional Republicans prepared to attack Clinton and his China policy by highlighting alleged security breaches by Chinese American scientist Wen Ho Lee, *The Washington Post* ran a story on March 21, 1999, headlined, "Chinese Spy Methods Limit Bid to Find Truth, Officials Say." The story did not directly quote a single official, but instead noted:

China's spying, they say, more typically involves cajoling morsels of information out of visiting foreign experts and tasking thousands of Chinese abroad to bring secrets home one at a time like ants carrying grains of sand. The Chinese have been assembling such grains of sand since at least the fourth century BC, when the military philosopher Sun Tzu noted the value of espionage in his classic work, The Art of War.

Students of history will recognize that the allusion to "ants" harks back to Cold War justifications to drop nuclear bombs on China, whose people were likened to insects, ready to swarm into other countries. History buffs will also recall that bitter rivals Athens and Sparta were locked together in the Peloponnesian Wars around the time that Sun Tzu was writing his classic; surely Western civilization had discovered the art of espionage by then. Indeed, the Bible makes several references to spies—centuries before Sun Tzu. But according to the "experts," the cultural predilection of Chinese toward espionage turns all Chinese Americans and visiting Chinese nationals, from students and tourists to business representatives and diplomats, into potential spies for China.

If sophisticated journalists and political leaders find it so easy to abandon good judgment and accept uncritically such strange and exotic absurdities, or to take that downhill spiral into the Asian Invasion and Yellow Peril journalism, what are Biff and Buffy likely to think? That their Asian American neighbors are rummaging through their garbage, sending every grain of sand "home"? Or that their missing pet has made it onto my dinner table? Some will reach those unfortunate conclusions, just as clever pundits and talk show hosts will exaggerate stereotypes without regard to how they are contributing to the racial harassment, taunting, and even acts of violence committed against Asian American schoolchildren and anyone who is "different." All Americans have an interest in a fair society that upholds its promise of equality and justice. At the same time, it is the special task of the Asian American population to put America on notice that we will not accept racial prejudice and discrimination against any people, including our own.

Such flash points come for Asian Americans at the dawn of a new century, when American prosperity is high and competition with Asia is low. It is a time when emergent Asian Americans are reaching out boldly to other communities to share our dreams and to learn about theirs. Fundamentally the dreams are the same, for freedom and family and the next generations. It is the vision that has sustained Americans from every shore. The next time tensions with Asia rise and the rhetoric grows ugly, perhaps Asian Americans will be working with people from other communities on constructive solutions, as Americans all.

Ruth Oya Woo, the mentor to so many of Washington State's Asian

American political candidates, asked me, "What will it take for Asian Americans to get there, to be a part of this American dream?"

I had no simple answer. But we've pushed open the door and moved inside. We're out of the shadows and into the light. With 10 million of us at the dawn of the millennium, there's no "back" to send us to. History, demographics, and our determination are on our side. What we have learned can't be taken away. We will be full partners in the future of America.

I see the evolution in my own family. My parents started out in America with little more than their dreams and convictions. They raised six children, scratching out a living. Of their six children, there's a corporate manager, an entrepreneur, a writer, and three attorneys, one of whom—my sister—is also an engineer. All the lawyers are public servants who entered the law as idealists hoping to make a difference. I—the writer—am the underachiever of the group, having ended my formal education at a bachelor's degree.

Auntie Betty's son Pete, my cousin the commercial airline pilot who is half Danish and half Chinese, likes to exclaim, "We're just like the United Nations." I've heard many other Asian American families say the same thing. My extended family, besides being Chinese American, includes Japanese-Okinawan American, Japanese American, Malaysian Chinese, Italian American, Scottish-German-Italian American, Filipino American, African American, Puerto Rican, and Jewish American. In the younger generation, there are scholars, athletes, and everything in between. One of my second cousins is seven feet two inches tall; he plays professional basketball in overseas leagues. And, most astonishing to me, some of my nieces and nephews refuse to eat Chinese food. I have to tell cousin Pete that, actually, we're just like the United States.

My father is buried in Burlington County, New Jersey, not far from where I grew up, in a cemetery overlooking the highway he drove nearly every day to deliver our homemade pink and blue baby novelties. Before his stroke, we asked him to tell some of his stories on videotape. They are familiar stories. His voice broke, as it always had when he recounted the tragic deaths of his mother, brother, and sister-in-law at the hands of the Japanese army. He spoke once again of the Chinese voyager who might have discovered America, exclaiming, "If only Cheng Ho had turned left instead of turning right!"

We asked Dad what he thought about his six American-born Chinese kids. Without hesitation he declared, "You're all too American! If I could do it all over again, I would raise you to be more Chinese." It was just like him, ever the critical Asian American immigrant parent whose kids could never achieve enough. My siblings and I, now adults with another generation of ABC children, just sit and roll our eyes, fidgeting at Dad's taped words, the same way we did when we were children at the dinner table.

Inside, I smile. I believe my mother when she says that Dad was proud of what his children had accomplished—though he would never tell us so himself. That he had high hopes for his many grandchildren. His dreams and those of the Asian Americans who came before him stay within each of us. They are the memories of where we've come from, the lessons of what we've been through, and the visions of roads we have yet to walk in this land called America. They are our dreams, Asian American dreams.

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